



## **Retiring Moderator's address to GA23**

**Very Rev Hamish Galloway**

*Thursday 28 September 2023*

Moderator, thank you for the chance to reflect on the last two years. And thank you to the Presbyterian Church for placing your trust in me as Moderator. I must admit there were times when I wondered!

Very early on, a senior minister in the Church said to me, 'You need to look more moderatorial Hamish!' So, what does that mean – more like Fakafo, or more like Rose? Not long after that I was with Andrew Doubleday, the Methodist President, at an event in Mangere. I had taken this earlier advice on board and was suitably dressed in a dark suit, as was Andrew. In a break in proceedings, we went for a walk in the mall together where a couple rushed up to us and asked which Mormon chapter we were from!

The truth is that a strength of our system is the way the Moderator changes every two years and the way each person is free to bring their own gifts and personality to the role. It has been a hugely enjoyable privilege for me to do just that and to represent the PCANZ in congregations up and down the motu and in ecumenical conversations with other churches and with partner churches overseas.

Thank you for your love and support. Over the two years I have received many individual messages of encouragement and support. The national staff were so supportive from the very start when we gathered to work on the Moderator theme together. Wayne Matheson has been a constant source of guidance and advice, Angela Singer has given great communications support, and the Council of Assembly a helpful reference point for me. Gordon Fitch and Matt Chamberlin were outstanding in their support and work around the ONE conference. Katrina Graham and Grace Webster at Assembly Office attended so quickly and efficiently to the practical arrangements that so often need to be made in this role. The love and support I have received from Te Aka Puaho, from moderators Marina and now Tamihana and from Honey Thrupp is deeply appreciated.

Previous Moderators have been a wonderful source of support, guidance and encouragement. There are those who have been close to the action, on whom I have leant heavily. Lance and Sandra Thomas who were chaplains to me, Sue Norton who with her late husband Andrew, travelled this Moderator journey with care, understanding and insight; the people of Cashmere, especially David Coster who has filled in there for me. And no one has been closer to the action than my wife Anne! Thank you, Anne, for your constant love, support, perceptive feedback and wise insight, and you have had put up with my constant travelling! Your love and support have meant a lot to me. Thank you.

As Moderator you come to appreciate the size and diversity of our Presbyterian movement throughout the land, and how we relate to the wider church here in New Zealand and overseas. The sheer size of the network of Presbyterian and Union congregations and building, trusts and social enterprises through this country is staggering.

And we also have in our movement the massive social impact of Presbyterian Support in seven different regions. And we have 13 Church Schools who are our connection with 1,000s of young people under the Presbyterian banner. Stephanie Wells is doing a great job in her role in the national Church connecting the Church and schools and it has been a highlight of my term to work with her in this area. It has been heartwarming and encouraging to see how both Presbyterian Support and the Church Schools movement have wanted to strengthen links with the PCANZ.

And with the help and encouragement of Phil King, our very effective and well-connected Global Mission Director, I have had the privilege of visiting with the leaders of the Church of Scotland, attended the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches, and connected with our partnerships in India, Niue and Vanuatu. We are part of a big and influential network.

If you withdrew PCANZ from NZ society today, it would create a big gap. Sometimes we can be a little down on ourselves as a Church, but be encouraged by the size, continuing influence and contribution of this Church in this land and beyond. And it is more than that, everywhere I went there were people of genuine and heartfelt Christian faith. In some cases, they were a loyal, faithful remnant of better days in their church, but in surprising places there was thriving church life and many encouraging signs of hope for this Presbyterian movement. I am encouraged!

That is not to say that there have not been clear and obvious challenges over the last two years! There have been some dark clouds hovering over this Moderator term:

1. COVID pandemic

The stresses and strains of dealing with COVID was a consistent and persistent topic of pastoral conversations as I sat with ministers and church leaders over the last two years. There was a huge variation of experience – for some churches there was a harmonious united front around how to deal with lockdowns, mandates and vaccinations. For others, there was huge strain caused by passionate disagreements. At the height of this there was a story in Christianity Today of a pastor and some long-term parishioners, for whom he had done family baptisms, weddings and funerals, who informed him that if he made them wear masks to church they were leaving! This is not untypical of the kinds of pastoral interactions many of our ministers and church leaders had to face. It has been stressful and disillusioning for those in pastoral ministry. It has negatively impacted the unity and size of some of our already vulnerable congregations. It strikes me there is much for us to reflect on and learn from here - is anyone researching this?

2. The Royal Commission into Abuse in Care

This is a sad shadow looming over church life in NZ. Some of the stories of abuse in care in Presbyterian contexts are heartbreaking. There is much to lament here, there is such a need for us to respond to victims with compassion and empathy, and incentive for us to work as hard as we can to make our churches as safe as possible for all who we connect with. May God be with you Rose and Wayne as you continue to help navigate the Church through this unfolding situation.

### 3. Aging Declining Congregations

A third cloud is the declining and aging trends in many of our congregations. It is important to say this is not universal. I was constantly pleasantly surprised by signs of vitality and growth in some congregations. We do have some stand out churches in a variety of different settings and there is real strength in many of our Pacific and Asian congregations. But there is a trend towards decline, aging and not fit for purpose buildings. It is a trend in the whole of the Western World. When meeting with the leaders of the Church of Scotland, they talked about the fact that they now have too many churches and need to restructure things for the future. So, for example, the Glasgow Presbytery has 120 churches and they are working to get that down to 80. This is causing much debate around how to do that. One of the respected commentators in the Church of Scotland, Doug Gay from Glasgow University, an article called *Crisis in the Kirk* he talks about five categories of church:

- a) Close unsustainable churches
- b) Care for (some) declining churches which will not grow again, as they decline
- c) Help (some) declining churches to grow again
- d) Help (the very few) growing churches to keep growing
- e) Plant new churches, re-seed or re-start some closed churches

Is that also a good model for us as we go forward into the future?

### 4. Intergenerational Connections

Related to this issue of decline and aging in our churches is that fact that generally speaking we are not connecting with the younger generations – the millennials and Gen Z are largely missing from our churches. This sparked my Moderator theme of Empowering Generations.

‘Hangaa e te Atua he whakapaparanga mo nga wa e heke mai nei’

Build, O God, generations for the times that are coming.

In workshops and in sermons, together with support and involvement from national staff members like Robin Humphries, Lisa Wells, Stephanie Wells, Matt Chamberlin, Gordon Fitch and Geoff New, this has been a constant theme of my engagement with the Church in the last three years.

Most recently there have been some interesting conversations with some of you who have consistently said we builder and baby boomer generations need to step back and hand over power in the Church to the younger generations. One said we need to put all our resources into children and family ministries, or we will die!

I agree with the sentiment here, and some pertinent questions come to mind...What happens if we don't do that?

If we relinquish power in this way, will we be able to stand on the sidelines cheering on or do we become cynical blockers who can't shut up about how good it was in our day?

If we relinquish power are the younger generations ready, able and willing to pick it up?

Last week the Uniting Church of Australia released a new resource that sets out their vision for what it means to live their life and faith as an Intergenerational Church. I am keen to have a good look at that and see what we can do to follow their lead.

## 5. Unity and Diversity

Another challenge for us, that is not new, is how we deal with issues like sexuality and gender. I have already spoken today on the Dialogue on Inclusivity.

It seems to me there is something bigger here in terms of how we maintain our unity and diversity. One of the things I love about our Church is that we are a broad church – you just have to look at the range of books on display here at the GA from Presbyterian authors to see that. When in Scotland I heard a great illustration of this. Mark Johnstone took me to Linlithgow to meet the vice-convenor of the Theological Forum of the Church of Scotland, the Rev Dr Liam Fraser. He talked about the work they are doing on setting the theological parameters for their broad church. He used an image that especially spoke to me - the fairway of the golf course. Theologically, as long as your ball is on the fairway that is ok, even if it is edging up against the rough or out of bounds. That image has occupied me as I contemplate our broad church. I was thinking of it recently as I flew out of Christchurch on yet another trip and as I looked down from the plane I saw the magnificent braided Waimakariri River. That is my image for the Church that has engaged me in conversation for the last two years. A braided river, defined by banks, but it is not a narrow stream, rather is a broad riverbed with many branches that separate at times only to come back together again. A new painting, just purchased to celebrate and remember these two years hangs in our home. Fittingly it is of a braided river.

Finally, can I say that the theme Rose has chosen is spot on. Authentic and Hopeful in Christ captures where we are at. We need to be real about the challenges we face but at the same time, there are signs of hope in Christ everywhere. In that respect, one of the most memorable conversations over the last two years was in Scotland with an old Scottish

academic, Andrew McGowan. We were talking about the challenges facing the Church of Scotland and I asked him what the future looked like for the church. He said that it felt like we were standing on the beach with the tide rushing out. There had been a time when the tide was in for the church and we were able to swim and frolic in the depths. But now it feels like we are struggling to hold our feet as the sand moves with the outgoing tide. But, he said, just as the tide goes out, it inevitable comes in again. It may not come in the same, but it will come in. As GK Chesterton put it, 'Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it has a God who knew the way out of the grave'.

Authentic and Hopeful in Christ – you nailed it Rose. So looking forward to the next two years as you lead the Church!